

Rural Tourism: A Tool for Local Community Development

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Abstract

The current era has witnessed a growing interest in exploring different facets of tourism due to evolving traveller preferences. Among these, rural tourism has consistently remained a prominent choice. This form of tourism not only enriches the travellers' experience but also contributes to the economic well-being of the local community in a sustainable manner. The aim of the study is to explore the insights on how local community play an important role in rural tourism development. The secondary data has been collected from journal articles found through google scholar, Scopus databases. The articles have been refined on the basis of keywords and selected for the study. Results conclude that knowledge sharing, empowerment, trust, and commitment are the important factors which drives the local community development. Managerial implications have been provided for the rural tourism purposes.

Keywords: Rural Tourism, Rural Destination, Rural Marketing, Local Community.

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INTRODUCTION

Rural tourism is an imperative tourism phenomenon, as it results in fulfilling the requirements of visitors who are dissatisfied by mass tourism. This provides an alternative form to the conventional mass tourism (Karthik, Jeniffer, & Chandran, 2023). In recent years, the global landscape of tourism has been undergoing a profound transformation, spurred by shifting consumer preferences and a heightened awareness of the environmental and cultural impacts of travel. Amidst this evolution, the concept of rural tourism has emerged as a focal point of interest for researchers, policymakers, and industry stakeholders alike. Rural areas, often overlooked in the traditional tourism discourse, have become magnets for travellers seeking authentic, immersive, and sustainable experiences. This surge in the popularity of rural tourism underscores its potential not only to enhance the quality of travel for individuals but also to invigorate the economic and socio-cultural fabric of host communities with help of Self-help groups, small tourism organisations, and SMEs (Kumar, Tiwari, & Mishra, 2015).

At the heart of successful rural tourism ventures lies a dynamic and symbiotic relationship between travellers' and the communities that call these serene landscapes home. Unlike conventional tourism models, rural tourism places the local community at its core,

recognizing their pivotal role as custodians of tradition, culture, and the natural environment. At the same time rural tourism places face challenges as well. Lack of trained manpower, insufficient financial support, lack of local involvement, business planning skills, trained tourist guide and communication skill are the major challenges of rural tourism development (Haldar, 2007). Rural tourism destinations may also not make advantage of online marketing and promotion platforms which helps in attracting more tourists (Kumar, 2018, 2021).

Local communities in rural areas possess an intrinsic knowledge of their surroundings, traditions, and ways of life, making them indispensable partners in the development and sustenance of rural tourism initiatives. Their active involvement not only enriches the authenticity of the tourist experience but also serves as a catalyst for socioeconomic growth. As visitors increasingly seek meaningful and transformative encounters, the local community becomes a living bridge, facilitating connections between travellers' and the essence of the destination. Given the context, the study aims to achieve the following;

- To find out the factors of local community involvement in rural tourism initiatives.
- To ascertain the role of these factors for rural tourism development.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The article has been collected from various national and international journals, periodicals, reports, books, academic theses and reviewed to gain insights on the topic. The article has been reviewed to explore the important factors responsible for local community roles in local tourism initiatives and how it affects the rural tourism in the local area. Further, the article has been designed based upon "TAILMRDCR" Model of writing an article (Kumar, 2023).

The secondary data has been collected from various journal articles found through google scholar, Scopus, Web of science databases. The articles have been refined on the basis of keywords such as rural tourism, local community, and rural destinations among others. A systematic process of examining the ideas, concepts, theories, practices, trends have been followed to explore on how rural tourism can be a tool for local community development. In due course of time, the rural tourism has been defined by various authors (Lane, 1994; Pedford, 1996); Xiong, 1999; Xiong, 1999; Wang, 1999; He & Li, 2002) as listed below:

Table: Definitions of Rural Tourism

Author & Year	Definitions
Lane B (1994)	"It can be defined as the country experience which encompasses a wide range of attractions and activities that take place in agricultural or non-urban areas." "It is a form of tourism that is located in rural areas, reflecting the differing and complex patterns of rural environment, economy, history and location."
Pedford (1996)	"The concept of rural tourism includes living history of the countryside such as rural customs, folklore, local and family traditions and the values and beliefs that make up a common heritage."
Xiong (1999)	"It is a type of tourism connected with the rural community and taking unique production forms, rural life and scenery as a travel objective."
Wang (1999)	"Rural tourism is a kind of tourism activity with agriculture and cultural landscapes, agro-ecological environment, agricultural activities and traditional folklore as resources, which invites people to visit, study, participate, and have entertainment, go shopping and spend vacation."
He and Li (2002)	"It is a kind of tourism activities taking natural and cultural landscape in rural areas as the tourism attraction."
Fan (2002)	"Rural tourism takes typical rural landscape resources as attractions, and meets the needs of tourists, such as seeking differences, knowledge and nostalgia."
Jingming and Lihua (2002)	"Rural tourism is a kind of rural activities and its characteristic is natural and humanistic. It includes customs, scenery, landscape, farm lands and other attractions. It is a type of activities which includes leisure, sightseeing, experiencing, learning, participation, and so on."
Huang (2003)	"Rural tourism takes rural landscape and traditional folklore as tourism resources. The activities of rural tourism include study, participation, entertainment, shopping and holiday."
Sharpley and Roberts (2004)	"They describe rural tourism as "a dynamic phenomenon."
Good Cha (2004)	"It is a series of tourism activities that happen in rural areas, its attraction being the natural landscape itself."
He (2004)	"It takes natural and social resources of agriculture as attraction and its source market is urban residents, it is an emerging activity with participation, deep culture and rich rurality whose aim is to meet tourists' demand of return to nature."
Guo and Han (2010)	"A new tourism operation takes place in rural areas, making use of the unique natural environment, pastoral landscape, folk culture and customs, farming culture, farm villages and other resources to provide sightseeing, leisure, experience, fitness, entertainment and shopping for tourists."
Jagmohan Negi and Gaurav Manohar (2011)	"Rural tourism may be defined as the activities of any person traveling and staying in rural areas other than those of their usual environment for less than one consecutive year for leisure, business and other purposes."
Nagaraju and Chandrashekara (2014)	"Any form of tourism that showcases the rural life, art, culture and heritage at rural locations, thereby benefiting the local community economically and socially, as well as enabling interaction between the tourists and the locals for a more enriching tourism experience."

Sources: Wang, Cheng, & Bijaya (2014)

Bontron and Lasnier (1997)

Opine that rural tourism impact differs mainly among rural areas and lean on a number of causes

including manpower attributes and seasonality problems.

A model of unified rural tourism, which took account of the diversified resources like (environmental, cultural,

social, economic), their use and also the role of applicable stakeholders was advanced to explore competent strategies of promoting tourism as a part of a rural development strategy.

According to Keane (2000)

The absence of economic heterogeneity is the key cause for the rural progression issue. It is argued that the beauty of rural tourism as a tool for growth is that it is focused on the natural and human environment of the rural region. However, the improvement of rural tourism will not only contribute to the development of tourist structures, also for the local community development and their livelihoods.

Fleisher and Falenstein (2000)

Precisely state that “the promotion of small-scale tourism is intuitively perceived as an appropriate type of economic development for rural areas.” Rural areas are not any longer related purely with agricultural artefact productions however are seen as locations for the incitement of latest socio-economic activity.

Haldar (2007)

Discusses the necessity of rural tourism and also how it helps in shaping the rural society. This study also attempts to develop strategic marketing plans for the successive rural tourism business which helps for the enhancement of rural people’s socio-economic condition. Both observation and survey method has been used in this study. Convenience sampling method was adopted for sampling, totally 150 responses collected equally from three cities in India (Noida, Ghaziabad and Delhi). Author concludes that marketing and legislation are required for favouring rural tourism.

Byrd, Bosley & Dronberger’s (2009)

Discover the variations in perceptions of tourism impacts on a rural people existed between the following stakeholders, host communities, rural entrepreneurs, public officials, and tourists in eastern North Carolina. Authors also strongly states, rural tourism will play a vital role in strengthening and diversifying the financial base of local communities whenever there is a decline in the traditional rural businesses like agriculture, fishing, mining, farming and forestry.

Su (2010)

Represents an endeavour to analyse six various methods of rural tourism development. This study was conducted in China and mores specifically discusses, the unified imagery of “Nong Jia Le” (Happy Farmer Home) which is examined a Chinese form of rural tourism. This study starts with highlighting the growth of rural tourism and its benefits to the local community in China. The author has pointed out, rural tourism development is not only creating increased revenue and new job prospects for local people. The author also stating other than

developments, rural tourism also facing number of challenges and issues in the sense of sustainability. Most of the operators and owners of small-scale rural tourism businesses are struggling with lack of managerial and marketing skills for running an efficient and sustainable business. Author concludes through his findings the rural tourism development is an efficient tool to distribute rural economy and alleviate poverty in rural areas.

Komppula (2014)

In this study author briefly investigates the role of small & medium scale entrepreneurs in the development of rural tourism destination competitiveness. Author further briefs the four major components of rural destination competitiveness are namely destination management, demand conditions, resources, and situational conditions. Small scales businesses and entrepreneurs are base of the tourism product by contributing the tourism reality, creating the site attractive and influencing the development above their own individual contribution.

This study examines the role of small-scale entrepreneurs is widely underestimated in the literature and models of competitiveness, even though in several region DMOs do not practise any resources which facilitating the tourism business but still DMOs has been over emphasized. So, individual enterprises and small-medium tourism entrepreneurs must be acknowledged and encouraged by the government.

Amir, Ghapar, and Jamal (2014)

Have conducted a study which explores the resilience of rural local communities in Malaysia with the help of rural tourism sustainability planning. Based on the authors view this study covers the participation of local government, sustainable rural development and community resiliency elements. This study briefly investigates the sustainable development possibilities in rural tourism and interpreting the factors which contributing to the resiliency of rural tourism community in Malaysia. The author’s states rural tourism societies are the highly vulnerable to economic disruptions and environmental threats that may disturb livelihoods and the well-being of that society. The authors suggest that the sustainable tourism development in a rural region may help in ensuring a resilience community.

Fun, Chium, Songan, and Nair (2014)

Have examined the correlations between host communities’ participation, relationship quality and rural tourism sustainability (cultural, social, environment and economic) with self-efficacy as moderator in the context of tourism industry in Sarawak region. The authors strongly argue tourism growth can be more effective with the participation of rural local communities, to achieve rural tourism sustainability, their views and priorities are much important for the decision-makers. This paper likewise talks about the

term Self-efficacy, which implies the individuals' decisions of their abilities to organize and execute strategies needed to accomplish assigned types of performances. The authors advocate the role of local communities, on the quality of connections with stakeholders and on how self-efficiency promotes sustainable rural tourism in Sarawak.

CONCLUSION

This article embarks on a journey to unravel the pivotal role local communities play in the realm of rural tourism. Rural tourism, an evolving facet of the broader tourism industry, has gained substantial recognition for its potential to deliver authentic, immersive experiences to travellers' while simultaneously invigorating local economies and preserving cultural heritage. Rural tourism may be a beneficial alternative source for women empowerment and their upliftment in the rural regions.

Managerial Implications

It is must for all levels of stakeholders in association with government agencies to promote a collective training program method in order to train them for marketing and managerial skills. Officials may focus on building trust, commitment, and offering satisfaction to the local community thorough offering involvement in rural tourism perspectives (Karthik, Jeniffer, & Chandran, 2023). Rural destination authorities may use Facebook to build trust and commitment with the tourists (Kumar, 2018, 2021).

Local community can be invited in decision making as they can offer better suggestion in development of rural tourism products and services using the local resources.

Rural tourism requires short and long-term planning, implementation, monitoring, environmental management, local involvement and sound legislations for the enhancement of business. It can also be done using Public Private Partnership route (Kumar, Tiwari, & Mishra, 2015). Tourism is part of a global process of enhancing the standard of living for both visitors and locals. In reality, if the area becomes more attractive to visitors, it would also be more attractive to new and existing residents.

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